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Presidential elections

Igor Botan, April 7, 2005

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1. Vladimir Voronin reelected as the President of the Republic of Moldova

Unexpected opposition move overshadowed the re-election on April 4, 2005 of Vladimir Voronin as a President. Configuration of the newly-elected Parliament, where Party of Communist's (PC) won 56 mandates, Moldova Democrata Bloc (MDB) 34 and Christian Democratic Popular Party (CDPP) 11 left a wide berth for political maneuvers as regards the election of the President by the MPs.

Given that Communists were short of five mandates in order to elect the President (61 needed), several scenarios were possible: a) opposition to boycott the presidential elections so as to trigger early parliamentary elections; b) Communists to secure the support of a part of opposition to endorse their candidate for the Presidency; c) wide consensus to be reached with opposition on a compromise candidate for the Presidency.

In the parliamentary election aftermath, each of the scenarios had different chances, albeit comparable. The situation overturned when the Moldova Democrata Bloc (MDB) had split: Moldova Noastra Alliance (MNA) - 23 deputies, Democratic Party (DP) - 8, and Social-Liberal Party (SLP) - 3. It was obvious right from the beginning that Democratic Party's decision to leave the MDB would produce the "domino effect". However, nobody could have predicted that it would reverberate over the election of the President, and this because none of the opposition groups designated their candidate for the presidency. Therefore, Communists designated two of them so as to comply with the Constitutional Court's requirements (Article 78 of the Constitution providing "at least two candidates should run for the position of the President of the Republic of Moldova").

The big intrigue of the day was that 56 Communists, 8 deputies of the Democratic Party, 11 Christian-Democrats and 3 Social-Liberals took part in the voting procedure. Eighteen deputies of the MNA faction did not take part in elections, while five deputies of the same faction were absent. Out of the 78 deputies who took part in elections, 75 cast their ballots in favor of Vladimir Voronin, one for his counter candidate Gheorghe Duca, while two ballots were declared invalid. Curiously enough, four years ago, 71 out of 89 deputies voted for Vladimir Voronin. During this campaign Party of Communists got 15 less mandates, while the President four more.

2. Foreign factor

One may well say that a political compromise was reached as a result of the negotiations held between Communist leader with the leaders of Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party, Democratic Party and Social-Liberal Party. Analyst Vladimir Socor claimed in the Jamestown's Eurasia Daily Monitor that "former U.S. Congressman John Conlan (R-AZ) was the indispensable facilitator in negotiations

and document drafting among the political leaders and factions in Chisinau over a two-week period". Intermediary variant was made possible due to "foreign factor", which certainly was present but is hard to estimate.

Therefore, to a large extent the same thing happened in Moldova as in Ukraine, when the heavy interference of the Russian Federation in the electoral race of 2004 triggered the same reaction from the west. In the case of Moldova, the three resolutions passed by the State Duma threatening with economic sanctions on the grounds it did not approve of RM's policies towards Transdnistria triggered reactions from important western circles. This time, foreign factor consisted in the mediation of a political consensus between President Voronin and a part of opposition. Christian-Democrat leader Iurie Rosca confirmed that when explaining his support to Vladimir Voronin "we have consulted our foreign partners. I have personally discussed with my friends in Bucharest, Tbilisi, Kiev, Washington and Brussels. I weighted the short time Moldova has to implement Action Plan Moldova - EU. When I have to take a tough political decision I do the following. I carefully consider what my enemy wants to achieve and do the opposite. In the last month I have noted several times that political foes of Moldova want to thwart Voronin's re-election. Simple logical reasoning, personal responsibility and state interests have led me to the conclusion to endorse Voronin".

On the other hand, it is not exactly right to talk of a wide consensus, given that Moldova Noastra Alliance boycotted presidential elections.

3. Terms of negotiations between President Voronin and opposition

In his speech to the Parliament prior to elections, President Voronin acknowledged that in the last four years he committed a series of mistakes brought by high expectations. In the next four years, President pledged to "fulfil national interests based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity". In this respect, he intended to achieve the following during his next mandate: a) implement EU - Moldova Action plan signed on February 22, 2005; b) improve socio-economic situation in line with the Poverty Reduction and Economic Growth Strategy (PREGS) voted on 2.12.2004; c) democratization of society in line with the first Copenhagen criteria (the main area of disagreement with opposition, where consensus was needed); d) settle Transdnistrian conflict with the support of US, EU, Romania, Ukraine and "fully exploiting the potential between Moldovan - Russian bilateral ties", etc.

President Voronin's offer to a large extent reiterates the provisions of the "Declaration of political partnership in view of achieving EU accession objective", unanimously voted by all the deputies during their first session on March 24, 2005. It is all-too-clear that the latter was aimed at testing the compatibility and political aspirations of all parliamentary factions. Unanimous vote showed that there were no strategic disagreements, but rather dissatisfaction with the main candidate to the Presidential seat, especially given his past track record. An illustration of this point is the fact that Moldova Noastra boycotted elections.

Christian-Democrat leader Iurie Rosca also stated after elections "our greatest controversial argument between Power and Opposition that kept us on different positions was the domestic policy of the governors. Our different visions on the functioning of democratic institutions, on the way human rights and freedoms should be ensured". To overcome those disagreements Christian-Democrats and Social-Liberals had submitted to Voronin a number of propositions, which Voronin pledged to fulfil in four months provided he would get elected. Generally, propositions accepted by Voronin refer to: a) ensuring media's independence (passing a new Law on Public Broadcaster, creating democratically a new Audiovisual Council, passing a new law on national TV and radio channels that would operate without censorship or political interference); b) ensuring independence of the judiciary by passing a new law on prosecution, amending the Law on Supreme Magistrate Council, Law on the Status of the Judge, Law on Judiciary; c) decentralizing local government, increasing the efficiency of public money spending by adopting a new Law on Accounts Chamber; d) amending Electoral Code to revise the establishment and membership of the Central Electoral Commission so as to depoliticize it and ensure its independence; e) perfecting laws on secret service that would ensure national security, human rights and freedoms and establish society's control over them by means of Parliament; f) creating a special commission to amend the Constitution in view of consolidation of state institutions by perfecting the procedures of election of the President, establishment of the Government, judiciary, elections of the Prosecutor General and the status of Prosecutor-General's Office.

Several days earlier Democratic Party set forth similar conditions, in addition asking for: a) passing amendments to the Constitution providing that Presidential position is incompatible with party membership; b) modernizing Party of Communists; c) giving up Orthodox-Marxist dogmas and revising party's goals in line with European norms and principles.

4. Are there any guarantees that re-elected President would keep his promises?

Apparently Vladimir Voronin was re-elected as a result of a consensus reached with opposition, still one question remains unanswered: what are the guarantees that President would stick to the promise made? At the first glance, there are no explicit ones. In the end of his speech to the Parliament Voronin just said "I consider each word uttered by me today as an imperative as a pledge". In the same discourse Voronin underlined "I am ready to discuss ... modifications to the legal framework so that the Presidential position would be incompatible with party membership". Immediately after elections, in an interview offered to mass-media he specified that the issue of compatibility will not be resolved very soon, once modernization of the Party of Communists is completed.

Opposition leaders haven't put too many hopes that Vladimir Voronin would rapidly fulfill all the negotiated conditions. Christian-Democrat leader stated that the political decision to support Voronin was "a tough one, it is very risky, but most importantly it is responsible". Social-Liberal leader quoted by Democratia newspaper said, "we only have the word of honor of an officer as a guarantee. We hope that military code hasn't disappeared yet in this world".

Still there are some guarantees that President Voronin would keep his promises made to opposition. For this to happen, President and his governing should observe RM laws and international agreements RM signed. Thus PREGS for 2004-2006 provides that "European integration is a key objective for the country development, thereby imposing consistent implementation of democratic norms, economic development model and European living standards". It is the only law of the RM that clearly outlines the European integration objective. Furthermore on February 22, 2005 Action Plan Moldova - EU was signed in Brussels providing to a large extent the same conditions set forth by opposition.

Indeed, it may happen that the governors would breach the aforesaid laws and international agreements, however in that case other guarantees that Voronin might have given to opposition might as well be breached.

5. What's next?

a) **Tasks of the ruling party** are more than clear. In the very first half of their mandate the new Government team to be appointed by Communists and their leader President Voronin would have to implement PREGS and Action Plan EU - Moldova. Those are rather complex tasks that might be jeopardized if Russia really delivers the threats it made.

Firstly, statement made by Aleksandr Reazanov, Deputy Chair of Gazprom that the prices on gas might go up for Moldova, thus reaching European level, coupled with plans by Transdnistrian authorities to set its own enterprise that would import gas thus breaking apart from "Moldova-gaz" - are clear signals of Russia's plans to set differentiated tariffs for the gas supplied to Chisinau and that supplied to Tiraspol. Consequently, energy challenges would only amplify the economic ones.

Secondly, GUUAM Summit scheduled for April 22 in Chisinau might infer new dimensions to Moldovan foreign policy and ways of settling Transdnistrian conflict. So far, it is still unclear what solution to Transdnistrian conflict would President Yushenko present. Ukraine's position is of crucial importance in resolving the conflict, especially if coordinated with EU and US. Russian side already stated it did not want any changes to the negotiations format, while "secessionist international" (Transdnistria, Abkhazia, and South Osetia) supported by Russia threatened to establish a military union. It comes as no surprise then that the provocations from Transdnistrian side are quite often lately.

Thirdly, it's hard to predict how would the modernization of the Party of Communists go. So far, President Voronin managed to steer away from any conflicts with the party. For the first time the intention to modernize the party was announced at the Communist Plenary of May 2002, however that wasn't achieved even at the fifth Congress held in December 2004 and was postponed till after elections. Having said that, it would be quite interesting to know whether President Voronin consulted his faction prior to negotiating with opposition? It would be also interesting to know what were the reactions of the faction members? The mere fact that Christian-Democrats and Social-Liberals kept secret their intention to take part in elections may lead us to suspect that Voronin didn't consult his faction either. This might be the case if

considering that is still uncertain whether the three votes cast against Voronin came from the Communists. If so, that might be the most dangerous indicator of a possible scission. Too dramatic were the changes Party of Communists has gone through. At the fourth Congress of the Party of Communists, on April 22, 2001, its delegates were ready to turn Moldova into "Cuba of the Europe", thereby setting an example how to revive Communism in the post-soviet countries, which were to form a new federation (a new USSR). Four years later on April 22, 2005 Chisinau would host GUUAM Summit, while three of its members openly committed to join the efforts in view of accession to EU. In fact, those dramatic changes came in response to the challenges posted by NATO and EU enlargement, but more so Russia's open support to Transdnistria separatist regime.

Under those circumstances, dramatic changes lie ahead of the ruling party during its next mandate.

b) Power - Opposition

After presidential elections the ruling party would have to confront "several oppositions". Leaders of Christian-Democrats, Democratic Party, Social-Liberals that supported Voronin's re-election publicly stated they would stay in opposition. Iurie Rosca, leader of Christian-Democrats commented on future relations: "From now on the days of hostility and mistrust between President Voronin and Christian-Democrats are long gone. We decided to establish a **constructive dialogue**, partnership, cooperation and complementary relations between the power and opposition. In the name of the national interests of the country, in the name of social peace, in the name of the European future of this country". That does not mean that the relationships between power and so-called "**constructive opposition**" uniting 22 deputies would be smooth. It would be "constructive opposition's" role to develop draft laws, on which it insisted, thereby testing the reactions of the governors' and overseeing the enforcement of PREGS and Action Plan Moldova - EU. A pragmatic relation seeking attainment of the same goals but from different positions would be of mutual benefit to power and opposition. The former could count on non-aggressiveness and cooperation of the latter upon crisis, especially those instigated from abroad. The latter would have only to gain if Party of Communists achieves the strategic goals that coincide with opposition's ones, and if on top of that Party of Communists modernizes and becomes an European party. Too nice to be true...

Moldova Noastra has already been labeled "**obstructive opposition**" for its failure to take part in the presidential elections. There are no strategic reasons that would explain the different actions taken by Moldova Noastra and its former MDB's partners Democratic Party and Social-Liberal Party. Certainly, we may admit that Moldova Noastra deputies are more principled than their former colleagues. Still, a more plausible explanation is the personal conflict between PC leader Vladimir Voronin and MNA leader Serafim Urechean. Evidence to this is the fact that back in 2001 Serafim Urechean saluted Communists' victory in elections and declared his readiness to cooperate with the new ruling. One year later, state run media launched a denigration campaign against Urechean accusing him of corruption, albeit it had never been proven in court. That made Urechean Voronin's top political foe, especially after the former defeated a Communist candidate in the 2003 mayoral race.

Apparently, for now Communists and Moldova Noastra are not on good terms. During a press conference after presidential elections MNA leader stated it would become "an active and not constructive" opposition that would be "critical of all the **ruling coalitions'** mistakes and would draw the attention of international community to its violations". In a recent interview to "Olvia-press" (Transdnestrian press agency) Urechean indicated that he did not exclude "repressions to start any day soon". MNA leaders did point the actions they might undertake, initiating referenda on direct election of the president and changing electoral system. Opinion polls show that 70-80% of Moldova citizens favor direct elections of the President as well as election of deputies in uninominal districts. Probably, MNA leaders intend to test Communists readiness to keep their promises to democratize society.

Most likely, Communists would face confrontations from the extra-parliamentary opposition. Out of the latter only three pro-Russian ones ("Patria-Rodina" Bloc, Labor Union, and Ravnopravie) would continue to gobble up into Communists electorate sharing leftist and pro-Russian visions.

c) Relations opposition - opposition

The triumph of the President Voronin, re-elected with the help of the "constructive opposition" has yet another dimension to it. In the near future the so-called "constructive" and "obstructive" oppositions would want to clear things out.

As it was to be expected the democratic media affiliated to "the two oppositions already started a debate to justify the "constructive opposition" on the one hand, and accusations of "betrayal" on the other. MNA is striving to promote the idea that Communists together with the "constructive opposition" represent a **governing coalition**. The latter refute, claiming the only thing they did was preventing a crisis and that they remained in opposition. In fact, one may not even talk of an alliance between the components of the "constructive opposition", they are so different that even the risk they assumed when supporting the re-election of Vladimir Voronin are different.

Democratic party having a 8% rating didn't risk too much endorsing Voronin as in the last three years it undertook numerous steps to convert Communists to social-democracy by organizing different fora, joint participation in a left and center-left political alliance, or ad-hoc alliances at the local level. The three Social-Liberal deputies bear a risk proportional to the political weight of the party, whose rating does not exceed 3%. Christian-Democrats bear the highest risks as their image of consistent "anti-communist" fighter is at stake. That is why, Iurie Rosca was saying that "From now on the days of hostility and mistrust between President Voronin and Christian Democratic Popular Party are long gone", not between PC and CDPP. However, one should not exaggerate the risks Christian-Democrats are taking, they made other "unexpected" moves in the past when they entered in coalitions with forces they considered to be their political enemies, or voted key issues with them: endorsing president Mircea Snegur in 1996 presidential elections, forming Alliance for Democracy and Reforms ruling coalition together with Democratic Party in 1998, voting for ousting the so-called democratic "Sturza Government" together with Communists and voting in "Braghis Government" in 1999. Nevertheless their rating

grew slowly but steadily. It seems it was the label "opposition forever" or "the party of 9%" that determined Christian-Democrats to take actions and get rid of "nationalist and extremist party" image perpetrated by governmental mass-media. As for the recent decision to endorse Voronin, if Christian-Democrats were wrong, they were wrong in one thing believing in his honesty, given that Voronin and Party of Communists stole Christian Democrats best tunes and not vice versa.

MNA might know a spectacular evolution, however this depends on whether its leader, Serafim Urechean, would decide to stay as Mayor of Chisinau or move to Parliament. If he goes for the mayoralty this means he is ready to continue confronting Party of Communists and probably "constructive opposition", while the big fight would be fought in two years during elections of the mayor.

However, for the MNA to survive and develop, its leader would need a facelift to get rid of the image created under the constant pressing of the governors. In the recent election campaign, Urechean had a more hesitating than a decisive message. On the one hand it was in the framework of European accession. On the other hand, his desire to portray himself as moderated politician, able to restore good ties with Russian and Ukraine, resume negotiations with Transdnistrian leaders was obvious. Of course, there is nothing wrong in it, except that he made several mistakes: a) stammering congratulations of Yanukovici after Ukrainian elections; b) interviews in Russian media featuring contradictory statements, and later refutations; c) accusation of bias brought to OSCE Observation Mission and arguments that the West supported Voronin and its Communist because of their anti-Russian rhetoric. This exactly coincided with statements made by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs etc. Governmental media cited the latter as evidence to the fact that Urechean was supported by Russian and Ukrainian circles interested in the survival of the Transdnistrian regime. Other evidences cited include: a) Russian authorities' provided support in hosting the Congress of "Patria Moldova" in Moscow that called people to vote for MDB; b) calls by Transdnistrian authorities for Moldovan citizens to vote for MDB.

As a MDB leader, Urechean couldn't provide his colleagues with a clear scenario in case they failed to become a ruling coalition: a) announcement of participation in protest rallies after parliamentary elections (expected Moldovan version of orange revolution) was made only because he new Christian-Democrats were organizing them, pointing to their interest in protest rallies rather than capacity to stage them; b) media reported that after elections MDB members were kept together only by means of threats; c) one month after elections MDB leader failed to provide a clear answer whether he would stay in mayoralty or move to Parliament; d) MDB failed to designate its own candidate for the presidency, nor was it able to clearly explain why they had boycotted elections.

The most eloquent illustration of MDB's inconsistency were the so-called "22 principle conditions" set forth by MDB for electing the President of the RM. To a large extend those conditions are to be found in those of the Democratic Party, Christian-Democratic Party and Social-Liberal Party, in addition they include: a) denouncing the Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and Russian Federation of 1992 on the settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict; b) immediately adopting a law that would outlaw Russian military presence on the soil of the Republic of

Moldova in Transdnestria; c) replacing Russian peacemaking troops with international UN, EU, or NATO forces; d) denouncing the Agreement on Founding Commonwealth of Independent States; e) amending Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova so as to change the name of the state language into "Romanian" etc.

Being asked whether he himself subscribes to those conditions, MNA leader replied those were not conditions but rather questions to the chief of state. Several days later in an interview to the Transdnestrian "Olvia-press" agency Urechean stated: "the so called "22 conditions" were unjustly attributed to us. We have never come up with such a thing". Later again he claimed those were released by his press service without him being informed.

The case of "22 conditions" is relevant in the context of lost opportunities. If MN leader had done a simply thing - inviting candidates running for the presidency and other opposition factions to TV debates on Moldova 1 channel, then he would have been an absolute winner, at least morally. And that because: a) President Voronin could not refuse, otherwise MNA would have had an excuse for not taking part in elections, i.e. President declined to have an open dialogue with citizens; b) MNA would have had an excellent opportunity to remind the President Voronin that he had avoided TV debates in a quite arrogant manner during the parliamentary election campaign; c) it would have been an occasion to present Voronin the "22 conditions-questions" within the discussion of his presidential platform; d) it would have been the most eloquent proof of media freedom, which would have left "constructive opposition" speechless.

As it didn't do that, MN and its leader left the impression they wanted to defy President Voronin, as they knew far-too-well those "22 conditions" would be unacceptable to him. This behavior does not justify boycotting elections, showing the obstructionism of the said move.

In fact, Urechean's actions were quite predictable long time ago. Even before the establishment of MDB in early 2004 he published a programming article in "Moldavskie vedomosti" newspaper (no. 619) entitled "Moldova should have a dream". He was wondering whether "authorities don't understand that friendship with Russia is not a result of political or economic conjuncture, but rather **a historic choice** of Moldova?". According to him, the **strategic goal** "alfa and omega of our evolution is Moldova accession to EU". For "Moldova's dream" to come true authorities should not titter from West to East, but rather go for the **middle way** of good relations both with West and East. That would have enabled Moldova to become "Switzerland of the Balkans" by capitalizing on the advantages of its geographic positioning. The "golden middle way" represents for Urechean "Republic of Moldova's organic integration in the free trade zone of the Southeastern Europe" as well as "in single economic zone of CIS" established by Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

So, one can say that the clash between "strategic goal" and "historic choice", coupled with the personal conflict between Serafim Urechean and President Voronin, pushed Moldova Democrata to split, resulting in "constructive" and "obstructive" opposition. The stake is quiet high, while the results of the clash depend on President Voronin's behavior. If he honors his promises, then "constructive" opposition wins enabling it to

grab Moldova Noastra's electorate (roughly estimated at 20%). Conversely, if Voronin doesn't honor his promises a part of "constructive" opposition would slip into a mere "collaborationist opposition", while the other would tacitly and humiliated join the "obstructionist" camp, with all the arising consequences.

1. The interest of Moldovan authorities for GUUAM

Chisinau will host the GUUAM summit on April 22. The interest for this regional structure has reappeared in Moldova with a couple of weeks before the March 6 parliamentary elections. Indeed, the authorities had pleaded for upgrading of the GUUAM about half a year ago. The attitude towards GUUAM was more than reticent until then. Vladimir Voronin said after being elected as chief of state in 2001 that Moldova would withdraw from GUUAM because this organisation follows anti-Russian goals.

There were many reasons after all, with all of them being related to the support of the Russian Federation for the Transdnestrian separatist regime, and they made the Moldovan authorities reconsider their attitude towards GUUAM in the past half a year, and two of these motives were decisive: a) the refusal of the Russian Federation to back the initiative on the Stability and Security Pact for Moldova (SSPM) released by President Voronin on June 1, 2004; b) repeated threats of the Russian State Duma to introduce economic sanctions against Moldova for its attitude towards the Transdnestrian separatist regime, with the threats aiming to obstruct the reelection of Vladimir Voronin as chief of state.

The evolution of attitude of Moldovan authorities towards GUUAM is interesting from these reasons. At the very beginning, President Voronin believed that implementation of the SSPM would ensure a "multilateral compromise" between Russia, the United States, Romania, Ukraine, and the European Union (EU) "on a number of principle problems of Moldovan statehood...representing the guarantee of a long-term stability in this region." The compromise was clearly envisaging the Transdnestria settlement. Voronin mentioned then that if the sides fail to reach a mutual agreement, this "failure would have evident impacts on stability and security in region." The SSPM was the first resonance initiative released by the chief of state, aimed to search new solutions to the Transdnestrian conflict, after the confusion related to refusal to sign the "Kozak Memorandum" in November 2003. Launching the SSPM, the Moldovan authorities wanted to avoid any actions which could provoke negative reactions from Russia. Perhaps this is the explanation why President Voronin had turned down the invitation of newly-elected Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili to attend the GUUAM summit in Batumi after Abashidze's run to Moscow.

As it was mentioned already the attitude towards GUUAM was changed after Russia had categorically turned down the SSPM. Russia's ostentatious support for the Transdnestrian separatist regime after failure of the "Kozak Memorandum", as well as the refusal to withdraw its military and ammunition from the eastern region of Moldova, required new approaches of problems related to settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict. As it seems, it was reached a conclusion that the approach of

this issue, including through a regional organisation to which Russia is not member with its typical interests in Transdnestria, would be a solution in this regard. GUUAM is the only structure of this kind.

It is interesting to highlight that the public authorities did not adopt any important documents on GUUAM till Russia's refusal to back the SSPM, though Moldova is part of this organisation since 1997. Instead, the situation has significantly changed after the Russian authorities turned down the SSPM, especially after the December 6-7, 2004 OSCE summit in Sofia, which discussed this initiative. The government order on creation of a task force to draft and implement the national plan on implementation of the project on facilitation of trade and transportation within GUUAM was published on December 10, 2004, and the plan was worked out and unveiled on February 25, 2005. Also, the government included the 17,300-dollar GUUAM membership fee for 2005 in the decision on payment of membership fees and debts of Moldova towards international and regional organisations from the 2005 state budget, published on January 28, 2005.

As it was said, this change of attitude towards GUUAM had one more justification. The lawmakers of the Russian State Duma, who initiated the adoption of three resolutions by the Russian State Duma last February, recommending the executive to apply economic sanctions against Moldova, publicly admitted that they wanted to obstruct Party of Moldovan Communists (PCRM) from winning the March 6 parliamentary elections and to halt the reelection of Vladimir Voronin as Moldova's chief of state. This sort of ostentatious actions of the State Duma made President Voronin behave the necessary way. His initiative to pay a flash visit to Kiev on March 1 in order to discuss a number of problems including the upgrading of GUUAM with President Viktor Yushchenko, as well as the immediately accepted invitation to Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili to visit Moldova on March 2, made the impression of some coordinated actions including with influent foreign political centres.

Undoubtedly, this initiative means that the Moldovan authorities decided to join the Carpathian Declaration on European development of Ukraine and Georgia, signed by Presidents Yushchenko and Saakashvili in early January 2005. President Voronin and his counterparts Yushchenko and, respectively, Saakashvili discussed on March 1 and 2 almost the same set of issues related to: a) regional security and combat of separatism; b) diversification of energy providing sources; c) upgrading of GUUAM for a joint settlement of regional problems; d) coordination of efforts for European integration. It was decided to convoke the GUUAM summit in Chisinau on April 22 for a better approach of these problems.

2. Development perspectives of GUUAM

Expectations related to the GUUAM summit generated both optimism, and much scepticism. Indeed, a first positive effect of convocation of the GUUAM summit in Chisinau was already observed in the internal policy of Moldova. One part of opposition gave up intention to block up the election of Moldovan president, with the need to set up the new central power bodies after elections and before the GUUAM summit being one of reasons invoked in this regard. As a result, the parliament

ratified on April 15 the following documents under emergency regime: a) Yalta Chart of GUUAM, the basic juridical document on constitution of organisation; b) GUUAM agreement on creation of free trade zone; c) agreement on creation of the GUUAM Information Office. However, the development perspectives of GUUAM after upgrading leave room for many questions related to:

a) interests and cohesion level of GUUAM-member states. At the very beginning, the tasks of the GUUAM-member states aimed to join efforts in order to ensure the conditions needed for an economic growth based on: development and implementation of joint projects on economics, trade, transportation, communications, financial cooperation; border, customs, scientific, etc. cooperation. Later, as the GUUAM members faced defiance, the tasks were reformulated: peaceful settlement of regional conflicts on basis of principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of borders; combat of aggressive separatism and international terrorism; coordination of cooperation of member states with international institutions (United Nations, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Council of Europe, Consultative Group of member states of Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, etc.)

However, a series of political and economic factors had jeopardized the development of GUUAM in the past years. The political factors comprise first of all the conflicts in member countries, for example between Moldova and Ukraine regarding the attitude towards the Transdnestrian separatism regime. Secondly, the West's attitude over the former Ukrainian administration of president Kuchma made the latter seriously consider the possibility to mainly focus on Russia-promoted projects - the Euro-Asiatic Economic Union, Joint Economic Space, etc.

As for economic factors, Russia had efficiently used the opportunities to defend its economic interests and to demonstrate the economic flabbiness of GUUAM. The decision to start the construction of the petrol pipe Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan had significantly reduced the interest of Azerbaijan and Georgia for transit of petrol through territories of other GUUAM states, as the Azerbaijani oil reserves were insufficient for building of other pipes. Once Russia had joined the Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan project, it found other energy compromise solutions with Azerbaijan, making this country more reticent over projects of GUUAM. The Russian authorities and oil business had successfully persuaded the former Kiev administration to use the Odessa-Brody pipe under reverse regime, contrary to initial plans on exportation of Caspian petrol to Poland's borders and further enlargement of the pipe to Gdansk. As this pipe surrounded Moldova's territory, the latter regarded this gesture as elimination from GUUAM projects, showing a similar behaviour towards this organisation. Nor Uzbekistan was forgotten, as the Gazprom concern signed agreements on exploitation and transportation of gas with this country as well. In addition, estimations of Russian experts aim to demonstrate that China's increasing interest for energy resources could offer a better perspective to countries in the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia to export hydrocarbons to this country with an impressive economic potential. It also means that there are evident contradictions between the EU and USA regarding the exportation of energy resources of Iran to the West.

If we add that the volume of mutual trade represents only two percent of the total volume of external trade of GUUAM states, we can conclude that mainly political factors and less economic factors dictated the upgrading of GUUAM so far.

The upgrading of GUUAM really follows the beginning of a new electoral cycle in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. Russia's direct meddling in elections in Abkhazya, Ukraine and Moldova; support for separatism in Georgia and Moldova; incitement for separatism in Ukraine through participation of Russian officials in the December 10, 2004 Severodonetsk congress seem to decisively determine the upgrading of GUUAM. It seems that the GUUAM-member states had reached the conclusion that defiance provoked by foreign meddling can be stopped only through joint efforts within this regional organisation. For example, the individual efforts of Georgia and Moldova to eliminate the risks related to the separatist regimes supported by Russia are viewed and understood in one way in Brussels and Washington. For sure, the same efforts of a regional organisation such as GUUAM, after Ukraine had also entered the risk zone of separatism, will be regarded on a different way in these capitals.

It can be said in this regard that an eventual success of the GUUAM summit in Chisinau could have a decisive impact on further developments. This success particularly depends on how Ukraine will be able to justify its ambitions of regional leader. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko mentioned in his speech at the Warsaw University on April 12 that he intends to unveil a new concept on regional partnership and leadership at the Chisinau summit. It seems that this concept envisages his Transnistria settlement initiative. It is known so far that this initiative is based on principles of "respect for Moldova's territorial integrity and insurance of a sufficient autonomy to Transnistria, and this would stabilise the political situation in the entire region." According to Yushchenko, settlement of conflicts near Ukraine's borders is an emergency, since the Ukraine-Moldova frontier is a bridge for illegal migration and trafficking. The participation of the OSCE and USA in equipping the checkpoints in line with modern standards and norms, as well as joint efforts could ensure an efficient settlement. On the other hand, political leaders, experts from Moldova and other countries expressed concern over secret nature of the work on the "project", which has the signs of some internal conflicts between groups of the Kiev administration with different interests in the Transnistrian region. This may provoke the failure of the "Ukrainian project" in Transnistria and ambitions of this country to become a regional leader, with negative consequences for GUUAM. The Moldovan authorities had promised to turn down any projects seeking an eventual settlement of the Transnistrian conflict through federalisation of Moldova.

b) interest of the U.S and E.U. for GUUAM. There is no doubt that the ability of GUUAM to survive and develop is directly proportionate to the interest of the USA and EU in this region. Therefore, the GUUAM members should back this interest. This interest was initially based on possibility to develop the so-called "Transportation Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Caspian Sea", an eventual restoration of the "Silk Road", which opened the access to regions rich of hydrocarbons in Central Asia. There are tries to get rid of the previous incapacity (till elections in Georgia and Ukraine) of the GUUAM-member states to reach the declared goals and maintain the interest of the USA and EU for this regional organisation by giving new valences to this stricture. Invitation of representatives of Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland, the

Baltics, etc. at the GUUAM summit in Chisinau opens perspectives for cooperation within GUUAM by attracting interests for much wider geopolitical projects such as the Black Sea Basin and Baltic Sea - Black Sea cooperation, areas which represent connections between the West and Central Asia. The USA and EU could show an increased interest for these perspectives. Although the economic interests of the USA and EU in region are related to a farther perspective, the interest for political stability and security should be very shaped, since illegal trafficking and migration in region represent a common threat;

c) perception and interest of Russia to oppose the development of GUUAM. The Russian authorities and experts had a negative attitude towards GUUAM from the very beginning, regarding this regional organisation as a threat for its political, economic and security interests in the post-Soviet area. That's why Russia had undertaken different successful measures in order to demonstrate the economic weakness of GUUAM. The recent meddling in elections in Ukraine and Moldova demonstrated that Russia wanted a lot to maintain the political control in region through very typical methods. However, the eventual creation of a collective security system in the GUUAM area had raised the deepest concern. The fact that Ukraine and Moldova had never joined the CIS Collective Security Agreement, while Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan withdrew from this security structure fueled these suspicions. In particular, Russian experts are concerned over declared intentions of Ukraine and Georgia to become NATO members in perspective. Although nobody nourishes illusions regarding the preparation and eventual terms of entry of these countries in NATO, the possibility of an intermediary cooperation between an eventual collective security system GUUAM and Euro-Atlantic structures is not excluded. Russia dislikes very much this sort of eventual cooperation. As it was said, GUUAM is the only regional structure in the CIS to which Russia is not a member, while the announced intention of GUUAM to cooperate for insurance of stability in the Black Sea Basin and the Black Sea-Baltic Sea region, areas where NATO and EU have recently enlarged, only fuels Russia's suspicions that the new NATO and EU members could become strong lawyers of interests of GUUAM states in relations with Washington and Brussels.

Russia had already reacted. It backed the intention of the "separatist international" made up by Transnistria, Abkhazya and South Ossetya to create a military alliance to combat the eventual integrating effects inside GUUAM. Also, Russia is indirectly introducing "economic sanctions" (the recent case of Moldova) by prohibiting the importation of agricultural or food products from veterinary or sanitary security reasons. However, the precedent experience had demonstrated that support for separatism and introduction of "economic sanctions" can have contradictory effects and harm Russia's interests.

Upgrading of GUUAM. Tendencies and perspectives

Iurie Gotisan, 25 April 2005

The reason to create the GUUAM is as actual and motivated as possible. The project on creation of an efficient union of states, regarded especially as an economic and, eventually, defence-military alliance, within the non-functional Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), was labelled as counterproductive since its creation in 1997, being permanently criticized and obstructed. Paradoxically, however, but these permanent attempts to undermine the strengthening of this group unveil indeed the special importance and efficiency of this alliance in case of a successful functioning. The very solid bases of this organisation guarantee the efficiency of such an association, extraordinary development potential of GUUAM.

- from economic point of view, the creation of this union of states in the Euro-Asian transportation corridor which rebuilds the old Silk Road and in the planned oil pipe Caspian Sea-West Europe via the Black Sea represents a reason to be well enough motivated, maybe the vault key of the planned spectacular development of region.
- from strategic and military viewpoints, it is not an accident that at least five hot zones "blood" in the GUUAM territory: Transnistria in Moldova; conflicts related to Crimea and the Black Sea navy in Ukraine; South Ossetya and Abkhazya in Georgia; Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan; armed conflict in the Fergana region in Uzbekistan. To highlight that each country of this group which faces separatist tensions negotiates more or less directly with Russia problems related to secessionist tendencies of different approached entities, as well as the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces from the GUUAM states. Elaboration of a coherent and convergent policy on defence policy and settlement of conflicts will provide an increased efficiency against division of initiatives in this regard.

However, many signals had fueled the fears regarding a normal development of this organisation. Delays, postponements, hesitations and oscillations regarding the fate and normal functioning of this organisation may be finally understood, if taking into account the difficulties faced by former Soviet states in all the sectors. Continuation of these uncertainties and late process of consolidation of organisation would forecast negative developments for the economic strategic future of region.

GUUAM - a new CEFTA

Development of organisation throughout commercial and energy transportation itineraries Europe-Caucasus-Asia will have very important consequences for countries in region. The existence of GUUAM as an interstate organisation will be an unquestionably important force in the context of placement at intersections of so many zones of interests, when it will be strengthened as a functional whole, with joint institutions, convergent foreign policy, well-coordinated defence strategy.

Thus, the organisation is developing on basis of a confluence area between Euro-Atlantic space, Russia, the Arab states, and the Asian continent. A regional construction like CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement) or Vishegrad Group would clearly attract western-European investors and others who would be much more motivated to finance projects jointly implemented by the GUUAM states and would not take into account the different interests that could appear in case of division and disappearance of organisation.

The East-European countries which created the Vishegrad Group demonstrated an extraordinary spirit of team, being heard as a much more stronger common voice in negotiations on entry in the European Union (E.U.) and NATO. Creation of CEFTA around the same group of East-European countries (regarded as an anteroom of E.U.) followed the same purpose: to create a free exchange zone aimed to ease the transition to economic integrity with the West and to reduce the effects of E.U. exigencies for candidate countries.

Invitation of Moldova to join a number of European and Euro-Atlantic organisations (Partnership for Peace, Stability Pact in South-East Europe, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, World Trade Organisation, etc.), as well as encouragement of GUUAM to turn into a free exchange zone (it is known the readiness of the U.S. administration to finance projects on institutional consolidation of GUUAM) are also indicators in favour of the need of a regional cooperation, coordination of efforts of states sharing the same interests for integration and elimination of economic difficulties.

If there are no other short-term opportunities to get rid of the economic impasse, development of planned transportation itineraries are the only way to energy independence and the very necessary economic development for the GUUAM states. This is an occasion that must be fructified at all costs.

Russia. Fears of "elder brother"

Russia's opposition, its fears over intentions of the five states are the key modulation point on sinusoid of existence of GUUAM. An union of post-Soviet states, created basically on economic criteria - outside of Russia must not be regarded as a defiance or even a threat of its interests. The wish of these states to plan an own future without participation of the "elder brother", the way it happened in the former Soviet Union, a situation typical to the CIS (that's why difficult), is normal and welcome. This happens when Russia, as main actor on the CIS scene, is incapable to provide material assistance to "satellites" first of all, since it faces very pressing internal problems.

Also, Russia had encouraged the creation of the Euro-Asian Economic Community within the same quasi-inefficient CIS, signing of the Minsk agreements regarding the strengthening of the Collective Security Agreement, demonstrating one more time that the pro-Russian core within the CIS is strengthened when the interests demand this. Even more, upgrading of ASC after the model of the former Warsaw Treaty, with placement of armed forces of signatory states of the treaty under a single command, becomes very significant (these are three regional groups: western Russia-Belarus, Caucasian Russia-Armenia, and Central-Asian Russia-Kazakhstan-

Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, whose armed forces return under Russia's command in case of aggression).

Also, it is worth to take into account that the CIS economies face a structural crisis on background of a social political instability, which can be hidden nor by the recent economic growth due to favourable exogenous factors. Although CIS adepts say that the former Soviet republics are interested in a single external economic vector, which would ease the access to extra-community markets, they do not follow the same geo-economic priorities in reality.

The case of Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan is an example in this regard, as their interests run counter each other concerning the problem of Caspian hydrocarbons. Armenia's industry, which is entirely dependent on importation of energy resources and jeopardized by Azerbaijan's blockade, is another example in this regard. The economic cooperation between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is undermined by the latent conflict in the Fergana region. The main problem in Belarus is to keep the state-owned property in economy, while Kazakhstan, by contrary, sells the most of enterprises to foreign companies. This state of things and namely an evident lack of progresses was identified by many analysts and political observers who admitted that there is almost no evolution regarding the creation of the single economic space, because every member state works in line with own rigours.

Perhaps CEEA was aimed to reduce the possible share of GUUAM, which Moscow regards as an anti-Russian arrangement dominated by Ukraine. An eventual adhesion of Ukraine to CEEA, which also holds a status of observer as Moldova does, would mean the death of GUUAM as regional economic structure uncontrolled by Moscow. Nor the fact that Russia wants to keep at least the control on exports on the eastern and northern sides of the Caspian Sea at all costs, after it lost the influence in Azerbaijan and Georgia, which are interested in the southern thoroughfare Baku-Tbilisi-Cheykhan.

The Russia-Moldova relationship must be based on equal ties, so that to eliminate any traces of vassalage relations which existed in the former Soviet Union. Russia's attraction in GUUAM would be very dangerous because of the impending danger to block up the functioning of mechanisms of the group: the five smaller states would experience again the disproportion between members, and there would be a natural tendency to an evolution of organisation for interest of the strongest one, and this fact would provoke unwanted frustrations and adverse reactions. The Russian fears regarding the future of GUUAM are in contradiction with the real interests of the five states.

Separatism - a common enemy

The hottest tension points in the former Soviet area are in territories of the GUUAM-member states. The Transnistrian separatism, Abkhazian-Ossetian separatism, the Crimea problem (along with the Black Sea navy issue), and the latest separatist "outbreaks" in the eastern region of Ukraine, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh are also obstacles on way of peace in region. They represent the

big provocation for Europe besides the Chechen problem and conflict in the former Yugoslavian area at the beginning of century.

The Tiraspol mafia clique is the main threat for stability and economic development of Moldova, and even for its existence as state. Withdrawal of at least "moral" support of the troops on the left bank of the Dniester river for the Tiraspol separatist regime gets a special importance. Pressures on Tiraspol (the first effects became real through start of the process of release of political prisoners) must be corroborated with pressures aimed at withdrawal of Russian troops from region.

The same fact is effective for Caucasus. Pullout of Russian troops from the so-called separatist "republics" would represent the beginning of normalization of situation in region. Coordination of efforts of diplomats of GUUAM states which face separatism-related problems, adoption of a common defence strategy in spirit of the Partnership for Peace principles would enhance a lot the effects on participating decision making factors.

The new Chisinau government carries decisions of a capital importance for future of the country. That's why Moldova, which had permanently affirmed its wish to strengthen the democratic and economic institutions in European spirit, must continue its way to Europe. Its guides on this way must follow one interest: to see the own people among large families of European democracies.

Ukrainian plan

Igor Botan, May 27, 2005

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1. "Ukrainian" plan is also Moldovan

The "Plan for resolving Transdnistrian conflict proposed by Ukraine" published on May 20, 2005 together with the comments that followed from Minister of Reintegration, Vasile Sova, shall generate many more debates in the future.

A closer look at the Plan, the context in which it was made public, collateral events, domestic and international reactions to the document both critical and more "balanced" ones, gives the impression of a show with actors playing their parts. Those left aside have been taken by surprise and are the mere spectators of the show.

The way "Ukrainian plan" was developed is reminiscent of Moldovan authorities approach after 2001 when it used to ask mediators to come up with propositions that would be acceptable to Republic of Moldova (RM). The benefit for the mediators was evident - reaping the laurels of regional leaders able to come up with solutions for the entire region.

Up to late 2003 Russian Federation had been RM's strategic partner that is why 2002 Kiev OSCE plan to a large extent reproduced federative model outlined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Diplomats hinted that Moldovan authorities requested the release of the document under OSCE auspices. It is known for a fact that when President Voronin decided to introduce the "asymmetric" elements into the federative plan, he asked his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to develop a new plan. After refusing to sign the "Kozak Memorandum" in November 2003, President Voronin publicly acknowledged that about 70% of the document had been written in Chisinau, while the rest 30% had been coordinated with Moscow and Tiraspol in view of reaching a compromise.

The same holds true for the Ukrainian plan. It is very unlikely Ukraine to have developed a plan without being asked by Chisinau first. Undoubtedly, prior to being made public the Plan's provisions have been carefully coordinated between Chisinau and Kiev. By doing so, Chisinau attempts to end the stalemate and create a new framework for the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict. The benefits for Ukraine are numerous, ambition to become a regional leader, but also the need to resolve a conflict at its borders.

Moldovan authorities' stake on the "Ukrainian Plan" is understandable, given that Kiev holds real levers to influence the situation by means of its customs policy at its border with Transdnistria. Still, it is not less important how other strategic actors are dealt with. Under those circumstances Moscow's role morphed from a pro-active to a defensive one, of defending its own interests and the interests of secessionist regime it has been supporting. Having said that, Russia and Transdnistria have practically the same interests - to reject the Plan.

US and EU positions have been taken into account in as far as they are committed to protect their interests in the region. Rejection of the "Kozak Memorandum" in November 2003 has shown that their interests resume to political stability in the region and not allowing proliferation of Russian military presence in the region. As for the rest, it is less relevant for US or EU whether a federative model or any other would be chosen.

2. The gist of "Ukrainian Plan"

The "Ukrainian Plan" gives the impression that what the authors wanted is very difficult to achieve. On the one hand, the main provisions of the plan reiterate the recent statements made by Moldovan authorities, i.e. giving up on federative model and renewing negotiation format.

On the other hand, the document clearly shows that its authors did not give up on previous engagements, ideas and even fears as regards Transdnestrian conflict, however these are worded differently in the "Ukrainian Plan". Indeed, this new approach seeks to avoid antagonizing Russian Federation even further, that already threatened to impose economic sanctions against Moldova.

As it was mentioned, in choosing the partner to propose the plan to resolve Transdnestrian conflict, Chisinau in fact chose the method of resolving the conflict. That was the case of the plans developed by the Russian Federation envisaging federalist models of resolving the conflict, methods which Transdnestrian authorities tended to turn into confederalist ones (similar to agreement between Serbia and Montenegro). Those models implied amending the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, with all the ensuing consequences.

The same holds true for the Ukrainian Plan that greatly resembles the model applied in Crimean Autonomous Republic. Thus according to the "Ukrainian Plan" Republic of Moldova is a sovereign, independent, and territorially integral state, the single subject of international law. Transdnestria is granted the status of autonomous republic within the framework of the current Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. Under the plan common areas would include: law, economy, defense, social field, customs, humanitarian, etc. Under "Ukrainian Plan" Transdnestrian region is to be "administrative-territorial entity in the form of a republic within the Republic of Moldova" entitled to its own Constitution and symbols along the state ones which is definitely taken from the Crimean model. Certainly, "Ukrainian Plan" contains provisions from other previous documents, from Primakov Memorandum of May 1997 to the most recent Stability and Security Pact for the Republic of Moldova. Of course there is more or less shift in accents.

However, more provisions have been taken from Primakov Memorandum. This specifically refers to pentagonal negotiation format (parts - Republic of Moldova, Transdnestria, and mediators - Russia, Ukraine, and OSCE). The innovation is that the latter are to sign the Plan in the presence of US and EU. Moldovan Minister of Reintegration has called this new formula a "floating format". The document allows for US and EU involvement in the Plan enforcement: a) overseeing elections to Transdnestrian Supreme Soviet; b) assisting the drafting of the law on special legal

status of Transdniestrian region; c) taking part in the Counseling Commission entrusted to settle down any disputes in interpreting the law on the special legal status of Transdniestria. Exceptions are "enforcement of international legal measures" in cases when one party or another breaches the plan, right reserved only to mediators - Russia, Ukraine and OSCE. Noteworthy, there is no mention of the type of measures to be applied.

However the most interesting are the terms, stages, and sequence of events provided for in the "Ukrainian Plan". The conflict is to be settled in three stages, six months each:

- a. at the first stage the "basic principles of the Transdniestrian status within the RM" are to be established. In this respect, the Parliament is to adopt by July 25, 2005 the Law on basic principles of the status of Transdniestrian region of the RM. Under the terms provided in the law, elections to the Transdniestrian Supreme Soviet are to be held in October - November 2005. These are to be held under "international monitoring of EU, OSCE, Council of Europe, US, Russia and other democratic states". These elections and international monitoring are intended to legitimize the Supreme Soviet that would function under the proposed Law on basic principles of the status of Transdniestrian region. "Ukrainian Plan" remains silent on how Tiraspol administration would act, nor does it say how to make the latter to be more cooperative. It is all-to-clear that this first stage would be implemented only if incumbent Transdniestrian authorities and Russia agree to sign the "Ukrainian Plan", placing thus the entire settlement process under the proposed Law on the legal principles of the status of Transdniestrian region.
- b. during the second stage the competencies shall be delimited between the central power and Transdniestrian authorities. This would need the adoption by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova of the Law on Special Legal Status of the Transdniestrian Region of the Republic of Moldova. Transdniestria's Supreme Soviet would have to pass a special normative act accepting the "basic principles of the state". The law shall be jointly drafted. Newly elected Supreme Soviet would have to "designate representatives of the regional legislative body to the RM parliamentary commission in view of drafting the law" outlining the special legal status of Transdniestria. Later on, once the RM Parliament adopts the law delimitating the competencies, Transdniestrian Supreme Soviet would have to pass another normative act ensuring the enforcement of that law.
- c. in the final stage the "final settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict" is to take place via "ensuring the legal status of Transdniestria in the framework of the RM". The two parties, Republic of Moldova and Transdniestria along with mediators, Russia, Ukraine and OSCE and with the assistance of US and EU would draft the "Treaty on guaranteeing Moldova's observance of Moldova's law on the special status of Transnistria." Once ratified by the RM Parliament the Law on special legal status of Transdniestria would enter in effect, while Supreme Soviet would be able to adopt Transdniestria's Constitution.

The guarantees granted by "Ukrainian Plan" to Transdnistria are specific to Moldova, as the very same guarantees were provided to Gagauz-Yeri in 1994. This is yet another evidence to the fact that Moldovan side took part in the elaboration of the Plan. Under the "Ukrainian Plan" Transdnistria would be entitled to "leave RM in case the latter decides to join another state" and/or RM loses its status as a subject of international law. Another Moldovan - style guarantee is the "Treaty on guaranteeing Moldova's observance of Moldova's law on the special status of Transdnistria", which is nothing but a different Stability and Security Pact for the Republic of Moldova launched by President Voronin one year ago. "Ukrainian Plan's" provision on Conciliation Committee including representatives of RM, Transdnistria, Russia, Ukraine, OSCE and possibly US and EU, is also a carryover from the Pact. The goal of the Commission would be to settle any disputes between the two parties in case of different interpretation of the Law on Special Status of Transdnistria. One of the major differences between the "Pact and Ukrainian" Plan is the fact that Romania was excluded, while Transdnistria included, whereas US and EU could only assist the drafting of the Treaty.

3. Context and collateral events

The context in which "Ukrainian Plan" was drafted and made public needs a closer examination. Firstly, this is the first document coming after the European Court on Human Rights' judgement on "Ilascu case" clearly indicated that from a military, political, and economic point of view Transdnistrian region had been accountable to Russian Federation. Albeit the latter disapproved of the ECHR's judgment, it still complied. Having said that, for more than a year now there have been premises for a new approach to resolving Transdnistrian conflict. Indeed, "Ukrainian Plan" ensues from this new context, however Moldova refrains from making the necessary adjustments, giving thus Russia a chance to save face and withdraw honorably from the region.

Secondly, the new context has been shaped by the regional tendencies, i.e. NATO and EU enlargement, the way Russian Federation protects its interests in the region. Recent revitalization of GUUAM and revision of its goal brought about the "Ukrainian Plan". Accordingly, US support to GUUAM is extremely important.

Thirdly, tensions arisen between Transdnistria's Supreme Soviet majority and Igor Smirnov's administration on the Constitution modification in view of reducing the latter's powers bear both risks and benefits for the Plan. On the one hand those tensions show the vulnerability of the regime functioning like a "fortress under siege" that ought to hold on regardless the price, including the price of maintaining an authoritarian regime headed by Smirnov clan (Maracutsa, Antiufeev, Litskai etc) that generated the conflict in the first place, then lead the regime and now is interested to perpetrate the status quo, of which they are the only ones to benefit both politically and economically. Those tensions also highlight the lack of democracy in Transdnistria, an extremely important factor in the new context of GUUAM declared goals. The "Ukrainian Plan" may serve as a good argument for Smirnov clan in "convincing via specific methods" the "reformatory deputies" from Transdnistria to give up on amending Constitution so as to resist the "foreign danger".

4. Estimations and possible evolutions

The release of the "Ukrainian Plan" may be seen as a positive event, even if the chances of its enforcement are very slim. At least there is a document that may be submitted to mediators, other interested parties, as well as US and EU, Romania. Except for Russia and Transdnistria, the other parties have no apparent reason to reject it, however they may want to come up with questions and ask for specifications. That is exactly what Chisinau wants.

The mere fact that Russia and Transdnistria voiced criticism and lingering concerns with regard to "Ukrainian Plan" did not take Moldovan authorities by surprise. Anyhow the first stage of the plan totally relies on Moldovan side that should adopt the would-be **Law on the Basic Principles of the Status of Transdnistrian Region of RM** by July 25, 2005. The adoption of such a law is probably intended to channel any initiative coming from foreign partners into the legal framework of the RM, whose sovereignty they respect. There is nothing more RM could do, everything now is up to the foreign powers. And here the benefits end, so let us consider the pitfalls of the "Ukrainian Plan".

Firstly, "Ukrainian Plan" does not provide for any measures "to convince" the Transdnistrian side, in case it chooses to ignore the plan. It is all-to-clear that Tiraspol regime has survived only due to Russia's and Ukraine's support. Still it would be possible to develop and apply mechanisms that would steer the region away from a humanitarian crisis and at the same time would determine Tiraspol to be more receptive to propositions on resolving Transdnistrian conflict. A starting point would be securing the RM - Ukraine border by establishing joint customs control units. By accepting such measures Ukraine would send a clear message as to its interest to settle Transdnistrian conflict. The failure to enforce such measures leaves room for speculations about an alleged competition between different "groups" in Kiev administration, namely Supreme Security Council Secretary Piotr Poroshenko and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Boris Tarasyuk. If indeed such a competition exists then "Ukrainian Plan" is nothing but a compromise between those "groups". And this because the Plan is not feasible in the given time without the aforesaid measures. Further, once the deadlines established for three phases expire Ukraine would most probably lose its interest. Under those circumstances, the primary goal for Transdnistria would be to survive up till the deadline, while later upcoming elections in Ukraine would open them new opportunities.

Secondly, the fears of opposition and many pundits that enforcement of the "Ukrainian Plan" would end with legitimizing Transdnistrian Supreme Soviet are quite real. Their argument is that by recommending monitored elections to the Supreme Soviet, "Ukrainian Plan" does not take into account Smirnov administration, a clan interested in perpetrating the secessionist regime, preserve the military, including Russian troops. The Plan does not take into account the structures that really "guarantee" the existence of the secessionist regime. "Ukrainian Plan" provides guarantees to Transdnistria, but none to Moldova in case Tiraspol ceases cooperating immediately after elections to the Supreme Soviet that would legitimize it as a representative body of the "Transdnistrian people". Technically speaking this could be achieved quite "convincingly". For instance Transdnistrian Supreme Soviet might adopt a "normative act" as provided by the Plan, thereby it would consent to

cooperation with Chisinau within the framework of the would-be **Law on Basic Principles of the Status of Transdnistrian Region of the RM**, and would allow for international monitoring over elections to Supreme Soviet in order to legitimize election results. However, Smirnov may want to make a well-calculated pause and then strike. Under the Constitution Smirnov might appeal to Constitutional Court of Transdnistria that would rule that "Ukrainian Plan" runs counter to Constitution. Therefore, supposedly not only the Supreme Soviet but the entire regime might get a legitimacy following the formula - who has coercive power to enforce judiciary rulings that one is legitimate. Who would stop the Supreme Soviet from acknowledging their own mistake?

Both Transdnistria and Russia would be quite tempted to halt Tiraspol's cooperation with Chisinau after elections to Supreme Soviet are recognized legitimate. The thing is that Russian troops would have to be withdrawn once the conflict is settled. There are a number of evidences to the fact that Russia does not want to withdraw its military from the region, the most eloquent of them - its stance towards obligations assumed at Istanbul OSCE Summit. Half-measures that would only legitimize Supreme Soviet leading to end of cooperation with Chisinau would result in fruitless discussions on the synchronizing withdrawal with final resolution of the conflict. Meanwhile, the effects of "economic sanctions" imposed by Russia on Moldova, coupled with a price hike on energy would serve as quite efficient levers in the hands of Russia when dealing with their Moldovan counterparts. One may conclude that **democratization** of the Transdnistrian regime via internationally monitored elections, without some **demilitarization** measures and without creating conditions for the departure of the groups responsible for instigating and benefiting from the conflict (as identified in the ECHR judgment), that is **decriminalization**, bears considerable risks. In fact "Ukrainian Plan" should be improved considering the provisions of the "Declaration on political partnership in view of accession to EU", unanimously voted by the Moldovan legislators. The document clearly indicates that Transdnistrian conflict should be settled in line with the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and international law in close cooperation with OSCE, EU, Romania, Russia, US, and Ukraine and according to the "3D" formula - democratization, demilitarization and decriminalization of the Transdnistrian region.

Out of all these "2D" and Romania felt out. This is quite sad as after Russia imposed economic sanctions on Moldova, Romania has proved to be one of the most useful partners. Nevertheless, "Ukrainian Plan" fails to confer any role whatsoever to Romania in the negotiation process. Moreover, apparently Moldovan authorities are interested in diminishing Romania's role even further. This has produced some curiosities in the "Ukrainian Plan", such as "the right of Transdnistrian **inhabitants(!)** to self-determination" in case Republic of Moldova loses its sovereignty and independence. Albeit situation has changed, Romania being now a member of NATO and is about to join EU, the same wording was used as in 1994 in the case of Gagauz Autonomy (Law on Special Legal Status of Gagauz-Yeri), which at that time provided guarantees that Moldova would not join Romania.

Several things are to be mentioned. Why it didn't cross the mind of Plan authors that the rights they came up with might be claimed by other communities as well. For instance, how would they like this: "the right of **Donbas inhabitants** to self-determination" in case they deem Ukrainian central government promotes pro-EU,

pro-NATO, and anti-Russian policies? Secondly, asymmetric treatment of the interested parties should be taken into account. On the one hand, Russia recognizing sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the RM but de facto controls politically, economically and military 15% of the RM territory; on the top of that adopts laws that would allow other territories (controlled by separatist regimes supported by it) to join Russian Federation, finally it has the status of mediator and guarantor. On the other hand, Romania having a frozen conflict at its borders is totally ignored in the conflict resolution. In this respect, curiously, census data revealing ethnic composition of the RM were made public right before the "Ukrainian Plan", despite international experts' advice not to do so. Supposedly, the low figure of Moldovan citizens who identified themselves as Romanians, only 2.1% determined the authors of "Ukrainian Plan" to ignore Romania. If so then things should be made clear: either the number of Romanians in Moldova is so low that the fears that Moldova would join Romania and therefore granted the "right of the Transdnistrian **inhabitants** to self-determination" are groundless; or the "right of the Transdnistrian **inhabitants** to self-determination" is justifiable and the census data are rigged. In both cases things are quite sad. Statistics data are not reliable given that they considerably differ from the number of votes in favor of parties, dubbed by official propaganda as pro-Romanian. If they were indeed reliable, then things are even more gloomier. In that case one would say that Moldovan citizens, tens and hundreds of thousands of them who applied for Romanian citizenship are cynics as they did so for obscure interests. Anyway the credibility of Moldovan authorities and the way citizens view them would have a crucial impact on the model of settling Transdnistrian conflict, its collateral effects, European integration, as well as visa regime negotiations with Romania.

What is the future of the Ukrainian plan on resolving Transdnistrian conflict?

Igor Botan, June 9, 2005

*Democracy and governing in Moldova
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1. Reactions from the civil society

As a follow-up to the provision of the "Ukrainian plan" on the need to secure the support of the Moldovan civil society to the plan, Association for Foreign Policy (AFP) founded by former high-rank officials (including Prime-Minister, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chair of the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Policy, Presidential Councilor), former diplomats and pundits in foreign policy have recently issued a statement on the strong and weak sides of the Plan.

Among the strong points of the Plan, the document cites: a) growing Ukraine's interest to resolve Transdnistrian conflict, especially given the levers it holds to influence the secessionist regime; b) abandoning federative formula and acceptance to resolve the conflict in line with the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova by creating a single rather than joint legal, economic, social, defense, and customs areas; c) emphasis on democratization of the Transdnistrian region in solving the conflict; d) involving US and EU as observers at certain stages of the conflict resolution.

On the other hand, the Association found out a string of ambiguities and contradictions that might seriously undermine the security, stability and sustainability of the reintegrated state, let alone pursuing its strategic goal - accession to EU. Among the flaws, AFP cited: a) no reference to demilitarization of the Transdnestrian region, as well as to securing Transdnistrian frontier in view of fighting illegal trafficking and smuggling; b) preserving the same guarantor countries - Russia and Ukraine - the same "peacekeeping" arrangement; c) proposition to hold "early free elections" to the "Transdnistrian Supreme Soviet" that would only legalize regime's institutions without leading to demilitarization and decriminalization of the region; d) hypothetical granting of the "residents' right to self-determination", all of which raise many eyebrows, etc.

In general AFP endorsed the "Ukrainian plan", however given the numerous aforesaid flaws it recommended Republic of Moldova to ask for the international community's assistance in determining Transdnistrian administration to take steps that would show "minimal political will" to democratize the region: complying with European Court for Human Rights' judgment and releasing political prisoners; eliminating all the obstacles hindering the withdrawal of Russian army and munitions; canceling all restrictions on the free circulation of goods and people to and from Transdnistria; free access of international missions to munitions warehouses.

Noteworthy, there is a certain degree of convergence between the AFP proposals and the actions already undertaken or to be undertaken by the authorities. This apparent convergence may only mean that certain measures have been left out on purpose so as to avoid its rejection right from the beginning by domestic and international stakeholders.

2. Reactions from parliamentary factions

Despite the aforesaid flaws, "Ukrainian plan" has been accepted in principle by the leaders of the parliamentary factions as a document that might lead to the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict. And this largely due to the fact that "Ukrainian plan" provides for the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict by granting a special legal status to the localities to the left of Dniester that would fall within the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. At least this might be inferred from politicians' statements, more so their reactions voiced after the meeting with President Voronin on June 6. At the meeting it was decided to convene a special session of the Parliament on June 10 to consider the provisions of the "Ukrainian plan" and adopt a Declaration regarding Parliament's position on the document. Practically all the leaders of parliamentary factions agreed that the Plan should be accepted as it is, the role of Moldovan authorities and political elite being to avoid the pitfalls and bring it in line with the European practices of conflict resolution. Noteworthy, if the said Declaration really stands a chance to be adopted than it is now, first time since the outbreak of the conflict in 1992.

3. Diplomatic efforts

The debates in Parliament and the would-be adoption by the legislators of a Declaration are aimed at reaching a wide consensus on resolving the conflict. At the same time, diplomatic efforts to secure international support to the "Ukrainian plan" gains grounds, which is of great importance for reaching a consensus domestically. Apparently, diplomatic activity is aimed at polishing the Plan's shortcomings that were pointed by the civil society and Moldovan opposition. Democratization of the region is clearly provided for in the "Ukrainian plan", while **demilitarization** and **decriminalization** are not. The latter are viewed by opposition as paramount. It is expected to achieve them with the help of the interested countries, European and Euro Atlantic institutions by resorting to Russia's obligation to withdraw its military from the region, European Court for Human Rights' judgment on "Ilascu case", securing the borders are cited.

President Voronin's trip to Brussels on June 7 - 8 right on the eve of the special hearing in Parliament on the "Ukrainian plan", his talks with the NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy fall within this logic. Noteworthy, both dignitaries played a major role in convincing President Voronin not to sign "Kozak Memorandum" more than one year ago. Last year both of them publicly supported the Declaration on the Stability and Security for the Republic of Moldova during the OSCE summit, which Russia rejected. Accordingly expectations that the two would endorse and correct the "Ukrainian plan" are justifiable.

Such diplomatic efforts would certainly have a positive impact on the Parliament reaching a consensus formula on the "Ukrainian plan". The more so as on June 7 President Voronin addressing North Atlantic Council made a couple of extremely important statements, namely: a) developing an Individual Action Plan Moldova - NATO that would be implemented in parallel with the EU - Moldova Action Plan; b) complete demilitarization of the Transdnistrian region, having civil peacekeepers with

the participation of US, OSCE, EU, and Ukraine; c) developing relations with NATO exceeding simple training exercises. "Real problems we are facing - terrorism, aggressive and intransigent secessionism, organized crime, trafficking in human beings, corruption, smuggling - pose a threat to the democratic essence of our country and therefore could only be solved together"; d) "immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of Russian Federation's military forces from the soil of the Republic of Moldova would speed up the settlement of the conflict"; e) replacing the current inefficient pentagonal peacekeeping format that would "lead to a sustainable settlement of the conflict. Procrastination of the conflict settlement shields the efforts to strengthen the secessionist regime and promote foreign geopolitical and mafia interests that are far from those of the people residing on both banks of Dniester river". Enlarging the negotiation format to include EU, OSCE, US, Russia, Ukraine and Romania; f) joint Moldovan - Ukrainian border and customs control on the Transdnistrian segment of the border; g) NATO and EU cooperation with Russia in settling Transdnistrian conflict, raising the issue of "human rights in Transdnistrian region, demanding immediate release of the two political detainees of the Ilascu group in conformity with the ECHR' judgment of July 8, 2004".

Having said that, there are premises for the acceptance both domestically and abroad of the "Ukrainian plan" as a basic document for settling Transdnistrian conflict. In this respect, some of the opposition media calls President to "strike while the iron is hot". And this for several reasons, firstly Ukraine needs Moldova's support in joining WTO, secondly international institutions want to get rid of a conflict at the EU and NATO borders. Under those circumstances, Russia has no other choice but to say that it endorses the document, agree to the enlargement of the negotiation format, only if **both** Moldova and Transdnistria agree to that. It is worth mentioning that those "supportive" statements come from Russia at the time they are closing their market to Moldovan goods and threaten to double the price on natural gas.

4. Reactions of the Transdnistrian authorities

After the first negative comments upon the release of "Ukrainian plan", Transdnistrian authorities have probably decided to ignore the said document. At least official media refrained for a period from any debates or comments. Only after the Two Presidents Voronin and Yushenko met on June 2 in Odessa the Transdnistrian media had to react. At that meeting two important things were decided: a) a joint address of the Two Presidents to the EU Secretary General and Chairman of the European Commission asking for international monitoring and control of the Transdnistrian portion of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border; b) creating joint Moldovan-Ukrainian customs units. The feedback in the Transdnistrian media came within the framework of the closed door meeting Ukrainian Secretary of the Security and Defense Council Piotr Poroshenko had with the separatist leader Igor Smirnov at the request of Viktor Yushenko. According to the official Transdnistrian press agency "Olvia-press" allegedly Poroshenko assured Transdnistrian authorities that the cornerstone of the "Ukrainian plan" was to "mutually reaching a compromise between the two parties involved in the conflict - Moldova and Transdnistria".

In their turn, Transdnistrian leaders declared they accepted only the "seven steps" to conflict resolution outlined by President Yushenko during the GUUAM Summit in Chisinau on April 22, especially the proposition on international monitoring of the elections to Transdnistrian Supreme Soviet as it would pave the way to legitimizing the regime. In fact, the latter is the only interest of the Tiraspol regime, especially as elections would be held pursuant to Transdnistrian legislation, fact allegedly confirmed by Poroshenko himself.

The conciliate reactions of Transdnistrian media to "Ukrainian plan" stem from the presuppositions that Transdnistrian authorities might follow Moldovan authorities' example in the case of the "Kozak Memorandum" that was initially "initialed" and then rejected. That is, Transdnistrian authorities might follow the Plan until Supreme Soviet elections get legitimize, afterwards they might call for "mutually reaching a compromise between the two parties involved in the conflict" as provided by the 1997 Primakov Memorandum. Russia endorses such as scenario and allegedly Poroshenko also does.

Why were new elections necessary?

Igor Botan, 27 June 2005

The Democratic Moldova Bloc (BMD) headed by Chisinau mayor Serafim Urechean garnered 28.53 percent of votes in the March 6 parliamentary elections, and got 34 out of 101 mandates in the new legislature. Under Article 70 of the Moldovan Constitution, "the quality of lawmaker is incompatible with any other post, except for didactic and scientific activity". Serafim Urechean decided to step down from the post of Chisinau mayor and to be lawmaker in the Moldovan Parliament on April 18, 2005, the last day of the one-month deadline after validation of mandate, when he was supposed to make a choice between the two offices.

Under provisions of Article 109 of Constitution and its interpretations by the Constitutional Court, the mayor must be elected at a new scrutiny. Thus, the elections for the Chisinau mayor became unavoidable. It's worth mentioning that neither the Election Code, nor the law on local public administration provide for the exact term for new elections. The first normative document says only that the Central Election Commission (CEC) establishes the date of new elections at least 60 days before election day." The second document envisages only the office of interim mayor since the mayoral post becomes vacant and till election of a new mayor. Thus, though new elections are mandatory, the legislation offers enough flexibility to the CEC for a concomitant organisation of elections in several localities where offices of mayors and councillors are vacant. Although the political opportunity factor must be excluded, the logic behind establishing the date of new elections is based on optimization of administrative efforts, expenditures, adequate coverage of campaigns in mass media. Thus, new local elections will take place in 14 localities of Moldova on July 10, though the mayoral posts became vacant in different periods. Of course, the public opinion focuses on capital of the country, but the results of elections in other localities will be suggestive for interpretations.

Going back to Serafim Urechean's decision to step down from the Chisinau mayor post, we must highlight that it was backed and criticized among his supporters. President Vladimir Voronin brought clarity to this disagreement situation during a visit to the Chisinau City Hall, shortly after Urechean had tendered resignation, saying that the "cold war" between central authorities and city hall was over.

It doesn't matter now that the war was "cold", but some questions must be answered after the end of the "war": who started it and with what purpose, who won and who lost, etc.? It is known that the "cold war", which had propaganda, legislative, administrative, political, etc. dimensions, started in early 2002, when the central authorities tried to revise local public administration system. This action perfectly complied then with logic of adjustment and inclusion of local public administration in the structure of the "state vertical power", whose building was proclaimed as a strategic objective. However, the early election of local councils scheduled for April 7, 2002, which should result with election of mayors by councils, were annulled. The March 14, 2003 decision # 13 of the Constitutional Court declared as unconstitutional the provisions of 13 articles from the December 28, 2001 Law on Local Public Administration, and 14 articles of the Election Code amended on January 25, 2002.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe also turned down the envisaged amendments.

The actions mentioned above represented only the prelude of the "cold war". The cause of this war was indicated later - "the struggle against corruption" in the Chisinau City Hall. It is interesting to underline that nobody doubted over existence of corruption in city hall. By contrary, the absolute majority of those who discussed this issue were sure of corruption there. The true concern was to demonstrate the existence of corruption to courts, as well as to provide evidence that this scourge persists in the central public administration, too. Why the "cold war" started only against the Chisinau City Hall, namely against the Chisinau mayor-general, was the question. The answer was also well-known - Chisinau is the key economic centre of Moldova, where the most profitable affairs take place, which has the most important contribution to GDP, raises largest collections to the budget, the highest financial inflows are registered here, etc., while its authorities did not want to be included in the "state power vertical".

These factors helped Chisinau mayor Serafim Urechean to become one of key leaders of opposition after the start of the "cold war", though he publicly assured immediately after the absolute victory of the Party of Moldovan Communists (PCRM) at the 2001 parliamentary elections that he is ready "to cooperate with the new government". "For the sake of Chisinau residents," of course. On one hand, the authorities insisted that Urechean's involvement in political life is a manoeuvre aimed to overturn the meaning of corruption-related cases inside the city hall, and to turn them into ordinary persecutions from political reasons. On the other hand, supporters regarded Urechean as a "sleepy lion" which woke up to join the Moldovan "big politics" after being provoked, knowing how to set accounts with those who spoiled his "nice dream" to "cooperate with the power."

Urechean met the expectations at municipal level, defeating the PCRM candidate to the Chisinau mayor post, Vasile Zgardan, at the May 25, 2003 elections. Urechean's victory was special, particularly because his main rival benefited of all the imaginable and impossible administrative resources. For that reason the same enthusiastic supporters of Urechean identified the Chisinau City Hall with "the last bastion of democracy" in Moldova. The victory was also decisive for appointment of Serafim Urechean as leader of a key opposition party - the Democratic Moldova Bloc. However, Urechean's BMD failed in the 2005 parliamentary elections after the victory in 2003. Therefore, it was very risky for Urechean to keep running the post of mayor, with such a decision meaning the continuation of the "cold war", obstruction of his normal activity, and incapacity to implement his project "Sociopolis" that he promised to Chisinau residents at the May 25, 2003 elections. In this regard, the "besieged fortress" strategy of PCRM against Chisinau was effective. Those who were down-hearted and tired of political, administrative, financial-budgetary manoeuvres of the Chisinau Municipal Council, government, etc., components of the "cold war", left the "last bastion" of democracy without any "battles".

A very bad situation followed the "cold war". The Chisinau residents were the main losers of the "cold war". They still face the range of unsolved old problems, which the "cold war" had even worsened. The worst is that Chisinau residents do not know at least whether the "cold war" was grounded, since the justice proved nothing after the

three-year "war". Thus, if Urechean is not corrupt, the "cold war" started by central authorities is an example of sounding abuse, with negative effect for the capital and its residents, especially for democratic processes in Moldova. If he is corrupt and the authorities could not prove his guilt for more than three years, with all their declared interest and arsenal, then Urechean is a very talented person who stands out on background of some authorities incapable to combat the corruption scourge through legal methods, though they just signed and adopted strategic documents such as the Moldova-European Union Action Plan, Strategy on prevention and struggle against corruption, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which call among others for democratisation of Moldova, anti-corruption fight, etc. In this regard, the metaphor of the chief of state regarding the "cold war" was very accurate and funny, but harmful for his party. It insistently raises the following question: will the authorities be capable to implement and fulfil the tasks outlined by these strategic documents? This question is not smutty, but it is serious for the future "national consensus".

Under these circumstances, the turnout of the new elections for the Chisinau mayor, regardless validated or not, will have a significant impact, including on further development of the party system in Moldova, which is crossing a critical phase. Thus, two parties of the so-called "constructive opposition" face internal conflicts, which affect their image and rating. The ruling party is also undertaking a declared modernisation process, and it is expected to review its basic documents, and eventually to change its name. This process is rather latent and it is part of promotion of internal and foreign policies by PCRM leader, which may generate internal tensions and would be probably fuelled from outside, though they serve as ground for the so-called "national consensus". Resignation of the leader of the so-called "active opposition, Serafim Urechean, who contests the actions of government and "constructive opposition", from the post of Chisinau mayor, and challenging of early elections create conditions for manifestation of perceptions of voters over the immediate effects of the "national consensus" and variances he had provoked between parties who supported him. It's worth mentioning that the "cold war" justifies his resignation from city hall and absolves Urechean of responsibility for his promise to implement the mega-project "Sociopolis", which called for another number of smaller projects such as "Buy Goods Made in Chisinau", "Your Apartment", "Protected Elderly", "Education", "Healthcare", "Anti-Poverty Struggle", "Clean Water", "Youth of Chisinau", "Chisinau - Centre of International Tourism", "Chisinau - Regional Commercial Centre", "Chisinau - Producer of Ecologically Clean Goods". The probability that Urechean could maintain the mayoral office at the 2007 general local elections was significantly declining given the ongoing "cold war". For this reason, it was logical to resign from the mayor post, which was reducing his perspectives, and to choose the office of lawmaker that opens new opportunities in national politics. His capacity to use the new opportunities is a problem of future, including of the Alliance Our Moldova, which elected Urechean as chairman at its June 25 congress of the party.

The effects of postponement of decision to resign from the mayoral post with one month and half after the March 6 parliamentary elections may be of a special importance so far. This delay "pushed" the new elections to the mid-summer, during vacations and holidays. Voter participation in the three general local elections held in Chisinau in April-May was around 45 percent. Thus, this percentage could decline in

the upcoming mid-summer elections. These forecasts are based on the fact that the problem of students' vote is not an issue anymore because of summer holidays. Previous local and parliamentary elections in 2003 and 2005 proved that students represent about 10 percent of the total number of voters in Chisinau. As a rule, many young and medium-aged families with moderate income leave the cities for summer holidays, especially for the sake of their children's health. It is hard to estimate their proportion but it wouldn't be exaggerate to forecast a voter turnout lower below 1/3, needed to validate elections. Also, the structure of electorate could be somehow distorting, if categories of citizens with a reduced "mobility" such as elderly, veterans, citizens with low and very low income would mainly cast their ballots on July 10. These categories of citizens need social assistance and that's why they are more motivated to vote, increasing the chances of parties viewed as targeting social protection.

Thus, the chances of candidates must be estimated both based on the party ratings and their evolutions after the "national consensus", and voter turnout and categories of voters casting their ballots. We saw that the latter may depend a lot on the time period elections are held, as well as on the dose of confusion generated by perception of the need of these elections provoked by the "end of the cold war", justification of this war, eventual effects, etc.

1. Would the July 10 elections be valid?

Currently the top question related to mayor elections is would they get the voter turnout required for validation. Under the law, elections are considered valid provided at least 1/3 of the total number of voters take part in elections. Statistics shows that the number of voters included in the voter rolls has been on the rise in the recent years. For instance, in the 2003 local elections 564 thousand voters were included in the voter rolls, while in the 2005 parliamentary elections 618 thousand. Parliamentary elections were held not so long ago, accordingly no major changes in the number of voters is to be expected. Consequently, for elections to be validated 206 thousand voters have to take part.

There are several grounds for fears of invalid elections. Firstly, political pundits and political leaders believe that the timing of elections is not right as many are in vacations and would not take part in elections. They claim the power forced CEC to set elections date for July 10 so as to diminish oppositions' chances in elections. It is known for a fact that Communist party electorate is represented mainly by elderly and Russian speakers. The former does not take vacations at all. As for the latter, they are very disciplined when it comes to elections and might postpone their vacation for later. Things are totally opposite when it comes to oppositions' electorate - not only do they lack discipline as compared to Communist electorate, they also lack civic consciousness. Practically, every second democratic voter would rather take a vacation than postpone it for political reasons.

Still it would be naive to consider that election date was set on July 10, only because it suited the governing party. In fact, the power didn't even had the levers to influence that decision, as CEC had to follow on Municipal Council's initiative to host elections in the capital. Under the law, following that initiative CEC had to set election date for the end of June, or early July. So it is a mere coincidence that the date set by the CEC is in the best interest of the ruling party, rather than an intricately contrived scenario. On top of that, low voter turnout and non-validation of the elections would hit hard democrats and Communists alike. Accordingly, the ruling party has the same interest as democrats do - July 10 elections to take place.

Second reason for elections to be considered invalid is the fact that students are out of town and would not be able to take part in elections. Opposition parties already blamed the ruling party "which has no interest in students' participation in elections, as they usually vote for the democrats". There are all the reasons to believe that even if the students were in Chisinau on election date, the situation wouldn't be much different, as they are usually quite passive. For instance in the past elections, CEC printed 42 thousand certificates granting the students the right to vote in any locality, however a little over two thousand showed up to pick the certificates. Further, out of those who did show up not all voted. Consequently, even if the students were on July 10 in Chisinau their presence wouldn't have had a significant impact on the voter turnout, nor on the votes garnered by electoral contestants.

Thirdly, there is a fear that many voters disappointed with the latest political developments would not show at the polling stations at all. This refers specifically to the Christian-Democrats' voters, accounting for 15% in Chisinau and those of Socio-Liberal Party, 1.5-2% accordingly. The two parties, previously known for their anti-Communist position, voted for Vladimir Voronin as a President and joined Communists on several important initiatives. Many Christian-Democrat and Social-Liberal voters disappointed by their leaders might choose to boycott elections. This holds true for the Social-Democrat voters (1.5 - 2%) frustrated that their party fails to score a victory, no matter how hard it tries.

All the aforesaid factors might result in a low turnout. At the same time, CEC is inclined to believe that July 10 elections would be rather validated than not. Firstly, they rightly point that in the previous parliamentary elections the voter turnout in Chisinau reached 55%. Even if the aforesaid factors would determine voters' passivity, they might steel at most 15-20%. If so, then another 35%-40% would still cast their ballots, enough for the elections to be validated.

CEC counts on the villages that are also part of the Chisinau municipality. The number of voters residing in those villages amounts to 100 thousand, out of which 70% regularly vote. Consequently, villages could provide one third of the so-much needed voters for the elections to be considered valid. The other two thirds could be secured by the loyal voters of the Party of Communists, "Moldova Noastra" Alliance and Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party.

Currently no one could tell for sure whether July 10 elections would be valid or not. Still, a mention should be made that there are more chances for them to succeed than fail.

2. Chances of the candidates running for the mayoralty

What distinguishes this campaign from others is that there are no clear leaders in the race. Of course, Communist candidate Zinaida Grecianii and independent Dumitru Braghis have a certain advantage, which does not guarantee that one of them would be elected. One month ago no one doubted that it would be the Communist and Moldova Noastra candidates that would fight for the mayoralty, however the mistakes made by them and their parties hence have dramatically changed the situation.

Many political pundits say it was a mistake for Communists to designate Zinaida Grecianii as she is not known in Chisinau. To put it differently she is known but only as a Minister not as solver of the many problems Chisinau is facing. These pundits claim that the ruling party should have designated a good administrator or a well-known personality. Initially, these were the general expectations and the following were cited: former Prime Minister Ion Sturza, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Andrei Stratan, Chief of Trade and Industry Chamber Gheorghe Cucu, Former Energy Minister Iacob Timciuc, former Minister of Transportation and Communications Vasile Zgardan. Each of the aforesaid, according to pundits claims would have been much more suitable for the mayoralty as they are either well-known or have hands-on experience in solving Chisinau problems. Probably Communists counted that Zinaida Grecianii would first make an order in the municipality finances

and after finding the funds would proceed to solving municipality problems. However these electoral calculations are hard to understand for an ordinary voter who would rather see a mayor knowing a little about many fields, than a lot in one field.

Furthermore, in contrast to the previous elections this time Communist candidate would face a tough competition on the centre-left playing ground. And this because another two candidates would fight for the same pro-Russian voters nostalgic for the old times, i.e. Valeriu Klimenko and Gheorghe Sima. The latter could count on no more than one percent, however the former representing "Ravnopravie" and the other two socialist parties ("Patria-Rodina" Bloc) may garner up to 8%. And this because Valeriu Klimenko might steal some traditionally-Communist voters disappointed with the policies promoted by the ruling party in the last year.

Zinaida Grecianii might easily concede the battle to Democratic Party's Vladimir Guritenco. He might be voted by some moderate Communist supporters that enjoy the friendship between the Democratic party and Social-Liberals and Christian-Democrats. Secondly, Vladimir Guritenco might lure many voters of the Botanica district where he is a praetor and enjoys a positive image. Thus far, Botanica district has been considered Communists' bastion.

The aforesaid factors might rob Zinaida Grecianii of many votes, experts forecast that she would garner less than 40% in the first round. There is no doubt, however, that she would get to the second round, when the big battle for the Mayoralty will be fought.

Albeit one of the favourites, still Dumitru Braghis might garner less votes than "Moldova Noastra" Alliance in 2003 elections. Former Prime-Minister refused to run on the party list and chose to run as an independent candidate. By doing so, pundits claim, he wanted to secure the support of Social-Democratic Party, Centrist Party, etc. However the move would cost him dear. Running as independent he might count on the 2% of Social-Democrat voters and 0.5% of the Centrist Union. On the contrary, by rejecting Moldova Noastra's offer he risks to lose the electorate of the former Independents' Alliance (traditionally voting for Urechian) and that of the former Liberal Party (led by Veaceslav Untila). All in all, they account for 15% of the Chisinau voters.

In addition, independent candidate Dumitru Braghis confirmed the rumours of scission within Moldova Noastra Alliance. This might also scare voters away, they might have voted for the leader of a party setting itself as the main opposition party, but would think twice before voting a "rebel leader" representing himself and a small group of followers. This complicates the task for the former Prime-Minister, still he stands real chances of getting to the second round and this only because other candidates are even weaker.

It is said that Christian-Democratic candidate might also end with less votes than usual. Thus far, Christian-Democrat candidates garnered between 10-15%, this time Gheorghe Susarenco's rating is said to be as low as 5-6%. And this because he is not a party member nor does he have enough experience with the Christian-Democrats that might have attracted the party's traditional electorate. Not less important the party has tarnished its image after voting for Communists.

It might well happen that some of the Christian-Democrat and Moldova Noastra voters would shift to independent Mihai Severovan. He might also win the support of liberal voters as he used to be a member of the party headed by Mircea Snegur and later by Veaceslav Untila; and of the/ Christian-Democrat voters being the closest to their ideals.

As for the rest of candidates they stand little chances of success according to many political analysts.